I offer the Turkish society a simple solution. We demand a democratic nation. We are not opposed to the unitary state and republic. We accept the republic, its unitary structure and laicism. However, we believe that it must be redefined as a democratic state respecting peoples, cultures and rights. On this basis, the Kurds must be free to organize in a way that they can live their culture and language and can develop economically and ecologically. This would allow Kurds, Turks and other cultures to come together under the roof of a democratic nation in Turkey. This is only possible, though, with a democratic constitution and an advanced legal framework warranting respect for different cultures. Our idea of a democratic nation is not defined by flags and borders. Our idea of a democratic nation embraces a model based on democracy instead of a model based on state structures and ethnic origins. Turkey needs to define itself as a country which includes all ethnic groups. This would be a model based on human rights instead of religion or race. Our idea of a democratic nation embraces all ethnic groups and cultures.

War and Peace in Kurdistan

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Perspectives for a political solution of the Kurdish question

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Perspectives for a political solution

of the Kurdish question

by Abdullah Ocalan

Contents

Foreword

Everyday life in the Middle East is dominated by numerous conflicts, which often appear strange to western eyes as they seem to elude the western understanding of ratio and logos. This is also true for the Kurdish question, one of the most complex and bloody fields of conflict in the Middle East still awaiting a solution. However, as long as we do not discuss all dimensions of this conflict equally, it will be continued and even further aggravated, thus creating new and far-reaching problems. The historical, economic and political dimensions of the Kurdish question exceed by far the Arab-Israeli conflict, which, in contrast with the Kurdish question, enjoys the attention of the international public. Knowledge about this conflict is limited, and because it is taking place in one of the most central regions of the Middle East both with respect to demography and geostrategic importance, this deficit often results in one-sided and superficial analysis of this complex problem.

Since the settlement area of the Kurds spans the present territories of Arabs, Persians and Turks the Kurdish question necessarily influences most of the region. A solution in one part of Kurdistan also affects other parts of Kurdistan and neighboring countries. Conversely, the destructive approach of actors in one country may have negative effects for the solution of the Kurdish question in one of the other countries. The rugged Kurdish landscape is practically made for armed struggle, and the Kurds have been fighting colonization or conquest by foreign powers since time

immemorial. Resistance has become part of their life and culture.

At the beginning of every solution process the conflict needs to be recognized and defined. With a view to the Kurdish question a realistic definition of the Kurdish *phenomenon* is therefore important. However, it is here already, where much of the disagreement begins. While the Arabs call the Kurds "Arabs from Yemen", the Turks call them "mountain Turks" and the Persians regard them as their ethnic counterparts. It is not astonishing, therefore, that their political stance in the Kurdish question is marked by arguments over definitions.

The Kurdish question has not been created out of the blue. It is the product of a long historical process and does not have much in common with similar issues in other parts of the world. In fact, there is a number of fundamental peculiarities and differences. Both of them need to be defined in a solution process. Any policy building merely on apparent common ground leads to irresolvable problems. A policy targeted on a solution needs to realistically analyze the phenomenon and include both the national, political and social background and also all parties involved in the conflict. It is indispensable, therefore, to recognize the existence of the Kurdish phenomenon. This, on the other hand, is not possible without information about the historical background.

Etymology of the words *Kurd* and *Kurdistan*

The name Kurdistan goes back to the Sumerian word *kur,* which meant something like mountain more than 5,000 years ago. The suffix *ti* stood for affiliation. The word *kurti* then had the meaning of *mountain tribe* or *mountain people*. The Luwians, a people settling in western Anatolia about 3,000 years ago, called Kurdistan *Gondwana*, which meant *land of the villages* in their language. In Kurdish, *gond* is still the word for village. During the reign of Assure the Kurds were called *Nairi*, which meant as much as *people by the river*.

In the Middle Ages under the reign of the Arab sultanates the Kurdish areas were referred to as *beled ekrad*. The Seljuk Sultans who spoke Persian were the first who used the word *Kurdistan*, land of the Kurds, in their official communiqués. The Ottoman sultans also called the settlement area of the Kurds Kurdistan. Until the twenties of the last century this was a generally used name. After 1925 the existence of the Kurds was denied, particularly in Turkey.

Kurdish settlement area and Kurdish language

They do exist, though. Kurdistan comprises an area of 450,000 square kilometers, which is surrounded by the settlement areas of the Persians, Azeris, Arabs, and Anatolian Turks. It is one of the most mountainous, forest and water rich areas in the Middle East and is pervaded by numerous fertile plains. Agriculture has been at home here for thousands of years. It was here that the Neolithic revolution began when the hunter-gatherers settled down and began farming the fields. The region is also called the *cradle of civilization*. Thanks to its geographical position the Kurds have been able to protect their existence as an ethnic community until today. On the other hand, it was the exposed position of the Kurdish settlement area which often wetted the appetite of external powers and invited them to raids and conquest. The Kurdish language reflects the influence of the Neolithic revolution, which is believed to have begun in the region of the Zagros and Taurus mountains. Kurdish belongs to the Indo-European family of languages.

A short outline of Kurdish history

It is highly probable that Kurdish language and culture began to develop during the fourth ice age (20,000–15,000 BC). They are one of the oldest autochthon populations in the region. About 6,000 BC they formed more branches. Historiography first mentions the Kurds as an ethnic group in connection with the Hurrians (3,000–2,000 BC). So it is assumed that the predecessors of the Kurds, the *Hurrians*, lived in tribal confederations and kingdoms together with the *Mitanni*, descendants of the Hurrians, the *Nairi*, the *Urarteans*, and the *Medes*. These political structures had already rudimentary state-like features. At that time patriarchal social structures were not very distinct. Both in the Neolithic agricultural societies as in the Kurdish social structures women had a prominent position, which showed also in the Neolithic revolution.

It was Zoroastrianism which lastingly changed the Kurdish way of thinking in the time between 700 and 550 BC. Zoroastrianism cultivated a way of life that was marked by work in the fields, where men and women were on par with each other. Love of animals had an important position and freedom was a high moral good. Zoroastrian culture equally influenced eastern and western civilization, since both Persians and Hellenes adopted many of these cultural influences. The Persian civilization, however, was founded by the Medes, which are believed to belong to the predecessors of the Kurds. In Herodotus' histories there is much evidence for a division of power among both ethnic groups

in the Persian Empire. This is also true for the subsequent Sassanid Empire.

During classic antiquity the Hellenic era left deep traces in the eastern hemisphere. The principalities Abgar in Urfa and Komagene, the center of which was near Adiyaman-Samsat, and the kingdom of Palmyra in Syria were deeply influenced by the Greeks. We may say that it is there that we can find the first synthesis of oriental and occidental cultural influences. This special cultural encounter lasted until Palmyra was conquered by the Roman Empire in 269 AD, which brought about long-term negative consequences for the development of the entire region. The appearance of the Sassanid Empire also did not end the Kurdish influence. We may assume that during this time (216–652 AD) the feudal structures were formed in Kurdistan. With the rise of feudalism the ethnic cohesion began to decay. The Kurdish society developed increasingly feudal structured bonds. This course of development towards a feudal civilization contributed sustainably to the Islamic revolution. Islam was directed against the slaveholder structures and changed the ethnical relations during the time of urbanization. At the same time it revolutionized the feudal societies mentally and gave them an ideological basis.

The decline of the Sassanid Empire (650 AD) helped Islam create a feudal Kurdish aristocracy, which was strongly influenced by Arabization. It became one of the strongest social and political formations of its time. The Kurdish dynasty of the *Ayyubids* (1175–1250 AD) evolved into one of the most potent dynasties of the Middle East, exercising great influence on the Kurds.

On the other hand, the Kurds maintained close relations to the Seljuk Sultanate, which took over the rule from the Abbasids in 1055. Dynasties of Kurdish descent like the *Sheddadis*, *Buyidis*, and *Marwanides* (990–1090) developed into feudal petty states. Other principalities followed. The ruling class of the Kurds enjoyed a large autonomy in the Ottoman Empire.

The 19th century offered the Kurds deep incisions. In the course of deteriorating relations with the Ottomans several Kurdish uprisings occurred. English and French missionaries brought the idea of separatism into the Armenian and Aramaic churches and contributed so to a chaotic situation. Furthermore, the relations between Armenians (Assyrians) and Kurds became notably worse. This fatal process ended in 1918 after World War II with the almost complete physical and cultural annihilation of the Armenians and Aramaeans, bearers of a culture several thousand years old.

Although the relations between Kurds and Turks had been seriously damaged, there was at the same time no breach in the relations between the Kurds on the one hand and the Armenians and Aramaeans on the other.

Struggles for resources, war and state terror in Kurdistan

In the past, the geostrategic position of Kurdistan had wetted appetites, which had made the country a pawn in the struggles over the distribution of resources, wars and state terror. This is still true today and goes back far into early history as Kurdistan had been exposed to attacks and raids by external powers at all times. The terror regimes of the Assyrian and Scythian Empires between 1000 and 1300 BC and the campaign of conquest by Alexander the Great are the best known examples. The Arab conquest was followed by the Islamization of Kurdistan. Much as Islam understands itself as a religion of peace, at its heart it has always been an ideology of conquest of the Arab nation, which was able to spread quickly in Kurdistan. Islam proceeded into the foothills of the Taurus and Zagros mountains. Tribes that put up resistance were exterminated. In 1000 AD Islam had hit its peak. Then, in the 13th and 14th centuries the Mongols invaded Kurdistan. Flight and displacement followed. After the battle of Chaldiran in 1514, which saw the Ottomans come off as victors, the natural eastern border of the empire was shifted further eastward. The treaty of Qasr-e Shirin officially established the Iranian and Turkish borders and concluded the partition of Kurdistan, which has continued into the present. Mesopotamia and the Kurds found themselves for the most part within the borders of the Ottoman Empire. Until 1800 a relative peace had prevailed between the Ottomans and the Kurdish principalities, which was based on the Sunni denomination of Islam that they had in common. Alevitic

and Zoroastrian Kurds, however, were defiant and took to resistance in the mountains.

After 1800 until the decline of the Ottoman Empire, Kurdistan was shaken by numerous rebellions, which were usually bloodily crushed. After the end of the Ottomans the Kurdish partition was even further deepened, exacerbating the atmosphere of violence. The rising imperialist powers Britain and France redrew the boundaries in the Middle East and gave Kurdistan under the rule of the Turkish republic, the Iranian peacock throne, the Iraqi monarchy and the Syrian-French regime.

Under the impression of the loss of a large part of its former territories, Turkey switched over to a strict policy of assimilation In order to enforce the unity of the remaining parts of the former empire in this way. All indications of the existence of a culture other than the Turkish were to be exterminated. They even banned the use of the Kurdish language.

The aspiring Pahlavi dynasty in Iran proceeded in the same way. The rebellion of the Kurdish tribal leader Simko Shikak from Urmiye and the emancipation struggle of the Kurdish republic of Mahabad were crushed in blood. The Shah established a terror regime in the spirit of the nationalist-fascist epoch at the beginning of the 20th century. In the Iraqi and Syrian parts of Kurdistan Britain and France suppressed the Kurdish emancipation efforts with the help of their Arab proxies. Here, too, a bloody colonial regime was established.

European colonialism and the Kurdish dilemma

Driven by ambitions for geostrategic supremacy and boundless greed, the European intervention policy in the Middle East became increasingly colonialist at the beginning of the 20th century. Its primary goal became the submission and control of the Middle East. This added a new form of colonialization to what the Kurds had already experienced over the course of history. This dilemma can be followed back into Sumerian times. However, western capitalism changed it in unimagined ways. For the Kurds, this meant that they were again confronted with new colonialist actors and that the solution of the Kurdish question had become even more difficult.

With a view to their interests, the new imperialist powers deemed it more advantageous to seek cooperation with the sultan and the administration of the empire in order to win them as allies, instead of breaking up the Ottoman Empire with unforeseeable consequences. This approach was meant to alleviate control over the region and the peoples living there. It was a method which was very popular in the British Empire. It found its way into the history books as the "divide and rule" strategy. In this way the Ottoman rule was extended for another hundred years. France and Germany had similar strategies. Their frictions did not influence the balance of powers in the Middle East.

Yet another focus of imperial preservation of power was put on the Christian ethnic groups. On the one hand, western colonialism pretended to protect the Anatolian Greeks, Armenians and

Aramaeans; on the other hand it incited these to rebel against the central power, which responded with massive repressions. The subsequent annihilation campaign was watched inactively by the western powers. Eventually, this policy antagonized the nations of the Middle East. Again, the Kurds were only pawns in the game of foreign interests. In the past the Kurdish aristocracy had collaborated with the Arab and Turkish dynasties. Now they allowed foreign powers to use them for their colonialist intrigues. By winning the cooperation of the Kurds the British succeeded to tie the anxious Turkish and Arab rulers to their interests. Then again, they were able to further tie the Armenians and Aramaeans to the colonial powers, which in turn were hard-pressed by the Kurdish feudal collaborators. The Turkish sultan, the Persian shah and the Arab rulers were not only victims of this policy, though. They played a similar game in order to preserve their power and to curb the greediness of the western powers. It was the people who suffered.

The ideological basis of colonial oppression and power politics in Kurdistan

Both the partition of Kurdistan and the forms of rule of the Arab, Persian, and Turkish regimes were a social setback for the Kurds in these parts of Kurdistan. Today's societal backwardness of the Kurds, which still stick to their feudal structures, is a product of these power relationships. With the coming of capitalist structures, from which the Kurds were mostly excluded, the development related divide between them and the Arab, Turkish, and Persian hegemonic societies grew larger. The power structures of the feudal rule mingled with bourgeois-capitalist power structures, which helped to preserve the dominance of their corresponding nations. Although these structures depended on imperialism, they were able to build up their own national economies, further develop their own cultures and stabilize their own state structures. In the areas of science and technology a national elite was coming of age. They forced all other ethnic groups in their countries to speak their language. With the help of a nationalist domestic and foreign policy they created a national ruling class, which saw itself as a hegemonic power with a view to the other ethnic groups. Police and military were expanded and strengthened in order to break the resistance of the peoples. The Kurds were not able to respond to that. They still had to suffer from the impacts the imperialist intrigues had had on them. They were confronted with an aggressive national chauvinism of the states that had the power in Kurdistan, and the legitimacy of their power was explained with adventurous ideological constructions.

Denial and self-denial

The hegemonic powers (i.e. Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria) denied the Kurds their existence as an ethnic group. In such surroundings the Kurds ran a great risk when they referred to their Kurdish roots. If people did so in spite of this, they could not even expect to be supported by their own ethnic group. For many Kurds open commitment to their origin and culture resulted in exclusion from all economic and social relations. Therefore, many Kurds denied their ethnic descent or kept quiet about it, and the respective regimes pushed this systematically. This denial strategy produced a lot of absurdities. For the Arab regime the Kurdish question did not exist. It had been resolved by enforced Islamization, they were sure. Islam was the only nation. And this nation was Arab.

The Persians even went a step farther and made the Kurds an ethnic subgroup of the Persians. In this way, the Kurds were granted all their rights in a natural way. Kurds who nonetheless demanded their rights and stuck to their ethnic identity were regarded as people who threw mud at their own nation and who therefore received the appropriate treatment.

The Turkish regime derived its claim for supremacy over the Kurds from alleged campaigns of conquest in Anatolia a thousand years ago. There had not been other peoples there. Therefore, *Kurd* and *Kurdistan* are non-words, non existent and not allowed to exist according to the official ideology. The use of these words equals an act of terrorism and is punished correspondingly.

However, in spite of all these ideological constructions: The Kurds are one of the oldest autochthon ethnic groups of the region.

Assimilation

Hegemonic powers often use assimilation as a tool when they are confronted with defiant ethnic groups. Language and culture are

also carriers of potential resistance, which can be desiccated by assimilation. Banning the native language and enforcing the use of a foreign language are quite effective tools. People who are no longer able to speak their native language will no longer cherish its characteristics which are rooted in ethnic, geographic and cultural given factors. Without the unifying element of language the uniting quality of collective ideas also disappears. Without this common basis the collective ties within the ethnic group break up and become lost. Consequently, the hegemonic language and culture gain ground in the conquered ethnic and language environment. Forced use of the hegemonic language results in withering of the native language until it becomes irrelevant. This happens even faster when the native language is not a literary language, like Kurdish. Assimilation strategy is not restricted to the use of language. It is applied in all public and social areas controlled by the state.

Kurdistan has often been the stage of cultural assimilation attempts by foreign hegemonic powers. The last hundred years of its history, however, have been the most destructive. The creation of modern nation-state structures in the hegemonic countries and the creation of a colonial system of rule in Kurdistan aggravated the assimilation attempts directed at the Kurdish language and culture.

Like Persian and Arabic before, now Turkish, too, became a hegemonic language by force. While the Kurds of the old times before modernity had been able to preserve their culture and language, these were now pushed back by the three hegemonic languages and cultures, which also had all of the modern media and communication tools at their disposal. Kurdish traditional songs and literature were banned. Thus, the Kurdish language, which had produced many works of literature in the Middle Ages, was threatened in its existence. Kurdish culture and language were declared subversive elements. Native language education was

banned. The hegemonic languages became the only languages that were allowed in the educational system, and thus the only languages used to teach the achievements of modernity.

The Turkish, Persian and Arab nation-states pursued a systematic assimilation policy using varying repressive means – both institutionally and socially – denying the Kurdish language and culture any legitimacy. Only the language and culture of the hegemony were supposed to survive.

Religion and nationalism

The hegemonic powers also used religion and nationalism to preserve their supremacy. In all parts of Kurdistan Islam is a state religion and used as a tool for controlling the population by the hegemonic powers. Even if these regimes distinctly embrace secularism the entanglement of political and religious institutions is obvious. While in Iran there is an openly theocratic regime in power, in other countries the instrumentalization of religion for political interests is kept concealed. So the Turkish state religious authority employs several hundred thousand Imams. Even Iran does not possess such an army of religious leaders. The religious schools are under the direct control of the state.

Quran schools and theological institutes and faculties employ almost half a million people. This really makes the constitutional postulate of secularism look absurd and rather like a placebo.

Wherever these ideas meet active politics they produce chaotic situations. Under the DP (Democracy Party) and the AP (Justice Party) governments religion was politicized openly. The military coups in March 1971 and September 1980 modified the Turkish ideological framework and redefined the role of religion. This initiated a re-islamization of the Turkish republic, similar to what had happened in Iran after Khomeini had seized power in 1979, albeit not that radical. In 2003 the AKP (Justice and Development Party) came into power and with it, for the first time, Is-

lamic ideologues. This election victory was no accident but the result of the long-term religious policy of the Turkish state.

Bourgeois nationalism

Another ideological tool of the hegemonic powers is the nationalism of the bourgeoisie. This ideology was most important in the 19th and 20th centuries when it became the dominant ideology of the nation-states. It formed the basis for the bourgeoisie to proceed against the interests of the workers and the real-socialist tendencies. Eventually, nationalism emerged as a logical result of the nation-state bearing almost religious features.

The Turkish form of nationalism that came into being after 1840 was an attempt to prevent the decay of the Ottoman Empire that had begun to show. The early Turkish nationalists were originally legalists. Later they turned against the sultanate of Abdulhamid II and became increasingly radical. The nationalism of the Young Turk movement expressed itself in the C*ommittee for Unity and Progress,* which worked for a constitutional reform of the state and aspired toward coming into power in the empire. Apart from that they had made it clear that they wanted to strengthen the empire again, which was externally weak and internally threatened by decay, by systematically modernizing it politically, militarily and economically. The opening of Germany's foreign policy toward the Middle East and Central Asia then added a racist component to Turkish nationalism. The genocide of the Armenians, Pontic Greeks, Aramaeans and Kurds followed. The young Turkish republic was marked by aggressive nationalism and a very narrow understanding of the nation-state. The slogan "one language, one nation, one country" became a political dogma. Although this was in principle a classless and no privileges state approach, the instruments to actually implement it were lacking. Its abstractness bore the danger of ideological fanaticism. Nationalism degraded into a tool of the ruling circles

and was mostly used to cover up their failures. Under the flag of the “superior Turkish identity” the entire society was sworn to an aggressive nationalism.

The war in Kurdistan and the state terrorism involved with it created a separate power block. As in other systems where certain power blocks derive their power from their military potential and base their existence on war, so they formed the Turkish society accordingly.

This is also why the political system lost its ability to solve conflicts. This is a system that has been formed by war and state terror, where it remains unclear which power centers serve which interests and goals – with equally disastrous effects for the Turkish and Kurdish communities.

Kurdish identity and Kurdish resistance

The identification process of the Kurds as a nation occurred comparatively late. Even if there was a commitment to being Kurdish in the Kurdish rebellions of the 19th century it did not go beyond opposition against the sultanate and the rule of the Shah. There were no ideas of alternative forms of life. A commitment to the Kurdish identity involved the creation of a Kurdish kingdom, in the sense of the traditional sultanates. The Kurds were very far from identifying themselves as a nation for a long time. It was only in the second half of the 20th century that the idea of a Kurdish identity began to develop in the course of intellectual debates mostly as a tendency of the Turkish left. However, this tendency lacked the intellectual potential to overcome more traditional ideas of Kurdish identity affiliated with tribal order and sheikdom. Both the real-socialist leaning communist parties and the liberal and feudal parties were far from understanding the idea of a Kurdish nation or the idea of the Kurds as an ethnic group. Only the left-leaning student movement of the 1970s was able to contribute substantially to the awareness that there was a Kurdish identity.

The ethnic identification process developed in the conflict relationship of the Turkish chauvinist national understanding and the Kurdish feudal national understanding. On the one hand there was the confrontation with the ideological hegemony of the system, often enough in left-looking attire, on the other hand the confrontation with the Kurdish aristocracy, who traditionally cooperated with the system. Liberation from these societal, political and ideological forces did not come easy. It required both intellectual potential and practical organizational work. This led directly into resistance. Since the 1970s, when the Kurdish emancipation efforts had not yet come of age, thirty-five years have passed. This time did not only enlighten the Kurds over their own identity and offer approaches for a solution of the Kurdish question; it is

also evidence that the Kurds and their emancipation cannot be suppressed by force in the long-term. No system can survive for a longer period, when it tries to transform its social contradictions forcibly. The Kurdish emancipation efforts also demonstrate that people cannot develop if they do not re-conquer their societal dignity.

The Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK)

Short outline of the history of origins of the PKK

In April 1973 a group of six people came together in order to form an independent Kurdish political organization. They acted on the assumption that Kurdistan was a classic colony, where the population was forcibly refused their right to self-determination. It was their prime goal to change this. This gathering may also be called the hour of birth of a new Kurdish movement.

Over the years, this group found new followers who helped them spread their conviction in the rural population of Kurdistan. More and more they clashed with Turkish security forces, armed tribesmen of the Kurdish aristocracy and rival political groups, which violently attacked the young movement. On November 27, 1978 the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) was founded in a small village near Diyarbakir. Twenty-two leading members of the movement took part in the inaugural meeting in order to set up more professional structures for the movement. In an urban environment the movement would not have survived, so they focused their activities on the rural Kurdish regions.

The Turkish authorities reacted harshly to the propaganda efforts of the PKK. Detentions and armed clashes followed. Both sides experienced losses. The situation in Turkey, however, was also coming to a point. The first signs of the imminent military coup were already visible in 1979. The PKK responded by withdrawing from Turkey into the mountains or into other countries of the Middle East. Only a small number of activists remained

in Turkey. This step helped the PKK to secure their survival. On September 12, 1980 the Turkish military overthrew the civil government and seized power. Many of the PKK cadres who had remained in Turkey were imprisoned by the military junta.

In this situation, the PKK had to determine whether they wanted to become an exile organization or a modern national liberation movement. After a short phase of re-organization a majority of members returned to Kurdistan and took up armed resistance against the fascist junta. The attacks on military facilities in Eruh and Semdili on August 15, 1984 proclaimed the official beginning of the armed resistance. Although there were deficits, the move towards becoming a national liberation movement had been made.

Originally the Turkish authorities – Turgut Ozal had just been elected prime minister – tried to play down the incident. The state propaganda called the guerrilla a "handful of bandits", which shows the mindset of those in charge there. A political approach to the conflict was not perceptible. The clashes grew into a war, which demanded numerous victims from either side.

It was only in the 1990s that the situation became less gridlocked, when the state seemed to become ready for a political solution. There were statements by Turgut Ozal and Suleyman Demirel, then President, indicating that they might recognize the Kurdish identity, raised hopes for an early end of the conflict. The PKK tried to strengthen this process by declaring a ceasefire in 1993. The sudden death of Turgut Ozal deprived this process of one of its most important protagonists. There were other obstacles, too. Some hardliners among the PKK stuck to the armed struggle; the situation among the leadership of the Turkish state was difficult and marked by conflicting interests; the attitude of the Iraqi Kurdish leaders Talabani and Barzani was also not helpful in deepening the peace process. It was the biggest opportunity for a peaceful solution of the Kurdish question until then, and it was lost.

Subsequently the conflict escalated. Both parties experienced high losses. However, even this escalation did not lift the deadlock. The years of war between 1994 and 1998 were lost years. In spite of several unilateral ceasefires on the part of the PKK, the Turkish state insisted on a military solution. The ceasefire of 1998 remained without a response as well. Rather, it stirred up a military confrontation between Turkey and Syria, which brought both countries to the edge of a war. In 1998 I went to Europe as the chairman of the PKK in order to promote a political solution. The following odyssey is well known. I was abducted from Kenya and brought to Turkey in violation of international law. This abduction was backed by an alliance of secret services and the public expected the conflict to further escalate then. However, the trial on the Turkish prison island of Imrali marked a political U-turn in the conflict and offered new perspectives for a political solution. At the same time this turn caused the PKK to reorient ideologically and politically. I had been working on these points already before my abduction. This was truly an ideological and political cut. What, then, were the real motives?

Main criticism

Doubtlessly, my abduction was a heavy blow for the PKK. It was nonetheless not the reason for the ideological and political cut. The PKK had been conceived as a party with a state-like hierarchical structure similar to other parties. Such a structure, however, causes a dialectic contradiction to the principles of democracy, freedom and equality, a contradiction in principle concerning all parties whatsoever their philosophy. Although the PKK stood for freedom-oriented views we had not been able to free ourselves from thinking in hierarchical structures.

Another main contradiction lay in the PKK's quest for institutional political power, which formed and aligned the party correspondingly. Structures aligned along the lines of institutional

power, however, are in conflict with societal democratization, which the PKK was declaredly espousing. Activists of any such party tend to orient themselves by superiors rather than by the society, or as the case may be aspire to such positions themselves. All of the three big ideological tendencies based on emancipative social conceptions have been confronted with this contradiction. Real-socialism and social democracy as well as national liberation movements when they tried to set up social conceptions beyond capitalism could not free themselves from the ideological constraints of the capitalist system. Quite early, they became pillars of the capitalist system while only seeking institutional political power instead of putting their focus on the democratization of the society.

Another main contradiction was the value of war in the ideological and political considerations of the PKK. War was understood as the continuation of politics by different means and romanticized as a strategic instrument.

This was a blatant contradiction to our self-perception as a movement struggling for the liberation of the society. According to this, the use of armed force can only be justified for the purpose of necessary self-defense. Anything going beyond that would be in violation of the socially emancipative approach that the PKK felt itself obliged to, since all repressive regimes in history had been based on war or had aligned their institutions according to the logic of warfare. The PKK believed that the armed struggle would be sufficient for winning the rights that the Kurds had been denied. Such a deterministic idea of war is neither socialist nor democratic, although the PKK saw itself as a democratic party. A really socialist party is neither oriented by state-like structures and hierarchies nor does it aspire to institutional political power, of which the basis is the protection of interests and power by war.

The supposed defeat of the PKK that the Turkish authorities believed they had accomplished by my abduction to Turkey was

eventually reason enough to critically and openly look into the reasons that had prevented us from making better progress with our liberation movement. The ideological and political cut undergone by the PKK made the seeming defeat a gateway to new horizons.

New strategic, philosophic and political approaches of the Kurdish liberation movement

A comprehensive treatment of the main strategic, ideological, philosophical, and political elements at the base of the process of change cannot be accomplished in this essay.

However, the cornerstones can be outlined as follows:

- The philosophical, political and value-related approaches that the newly-aligned PKK embraces find adequate expression in what is called "democratic socialism".
- The PKK does not derive the creation of a Kurdish nation-state from the right of self-determination of the peoples. However, we regard this right as the basis for the establishment of grassroots democracies, without seeking new political borders. It is up to the PKK to convince the Kurdish society of their conviction. This is also true for the dialogue with the hegemonic countries exercising power in Kurdistan. It is to be the basis for a solution of the existing issues.
- The countries that presently exist here need democratic reforms going beyond mere lip service to democracy. It is not realistic, though, to go for the immediate abolition of the state. This does not mean that we have to take it as it is. The classic state structure with its despotic attitude of power is unacceptable. The institutional state needs to be subjected to democratic changes. At the end of this process, there should be a lean state as a political institution, which only observes functions in the fields

of internal and external security and in the provision of social security. Such an idea of the state has nothing in common with the authoritarian character of the classic state, but would rather be regarded as a societal authority.

- The Kurdish liberation movement is working for a system of democratic self-organization in Kurdistan with the features of a confederation. Democratic confederalism understands itself as a coordination model for a democratic nation. It provides a framework, within which interalia minorities, religious communities, cultural groups, gender-specific groups and other societal groups can organize autonomously. This model may also be called a way of organization for democratic nations and cultures. The democratization process in Kurdistan is not limited to matters of form but, rather, poses a broad societal project aiming at the economic, social and political sovereignty of all parts of the society. It advances the building of necessary institutions and creates the instruments for democratic self-government and control. It is a continuous and long-term process. Elections are not the only means in this context. Rather, this is a dynamic political process which needs direct intervention by the sovereign, the people. The people are to be directly involved in the decision-finding processes of the society. This project builds on the self-government of the local communities and is organized in the form of open councils, town councils, local parliaments, and larger congresses. The citizens themselves are the agents of this kind of self-government, not state-based authorities. The principle of federal self-government has no restrictions. It can even be continued across borders in order to create multinational democratic structures. Democratic confederalism prefers flat hierarchies so as to further decision finding and decision making at the level of the communities.
- The model outlined above may also be described as autonomous democratic self-government, where the state-related sov-

ereign rights are only limited. Such a model allows a more adequate implementation of basic values like freedom and equality than traditional administrative models. This model need not be restricted to Turkey, but may also be applicable in the other parts of Kurdistan. Simultaneously, this model is suitable for the building of federal administrative structures in all Kurdish settlement areas in Syria, Turkey, Iraq and Iran. Thus, it is possible to build confederate structures across all parts of Kurdistan without the need to question the existing borders.

- The decline of real-socialism was also a result of how the socialist countries used their power both internally and externally and of the fact that they misconceived the importance of the gender issue. Women and power seem to be quite contradictory things. In real-socialism, the question of women's rights was a rather subordinate issue, which was believed to be resolved anyway once the economic and other societal problems would be solved. However, women may also be regarded as an oppressed class and nation or an oppressed gender. As long as we do not discuss freedom and equal treatment of women in a historical and societal context, as long as no adequate theory has been devised, there will not be an adequate practice either. Therefore, women's liberation must assume a main strategic part in the democratic struggle for freedom in Kurdistan.
- Today, the democratization of politics is one of the most urgent challenges. However, democratic politics needs democratic parties. As long as there are no parties and party-affiliated institutions committed to the interests of the society instead of fulfilling state orders, a democratization of politics will be hardly possible. In Turkey, the parties are only propaganda tools of the state enjoying public alimentation. Their transformation into parties committed exclusively to the interests of the society, and the creation of the necessary legal basis in this context would be an important part of a political reform. The founding of parties

bearing the word Kurdistan in their name is still a criminal act. Independent parties are still obstructed in many ways. Kurdistan-related parties of coalitions serve the democratization as long as they do not advocate separatism or the use of violence.

- There is a widespread individual and institutional subservient spirit, which is one of the biggest obstacles in the way of democratization. It can only be overcome by creating an awareness of democracy in all parts of the society. The citizens must be invited to actively commit themselves for democracy. For the Kurds, this means building democratic structures in all parts of Kurdistan and wherever there are Kurdish communities, which advance the active participation in the political life of the community. The minorities living in Kurdistan must be invited to participate as well. The development of grassroots-level democratic structures and a corresponding practical approach must have top priority. Such grassroots structures must be regarded as obligatory even where basic democratic and legal principles are violated as in the Middle East.
- Politics needs independent media. Without them the state structures will not develop any sensitivity for questions of democracy. Nor will it be possible to bring democracy into politics. Freedom of information is not only a right of the individual. It also involves a societal dimension. Independent media have also always a societal mandate. Their communication with the public must be marked by democratic balance.
- Feudal institutions like tribes, sheikdom, aghas and sectarianism, which are essentially relics of the Middle Ages, are like the institutions of classic nation-states obstacles in the way of democratization. They must be urged appropriately to join the democratic change. These parasitic institutions must be overcome with top priority.
- The right to native language education must be warranted. Even if the authorities do not advance such education, they must

not impede civic efforts for the creation of institutions offering Kurdish language and culture education. The health system must be warranted by both state and civil society.

- An ecological model of society is essentially socialist. The establishment of an ecological balance will only be accomplished during the transition phase from an alienated class society based on despotism to a socialist society. It would be an illusion to hope for the conservation of the environment in a capitalist system. These systems largely participate in the ecological devastation. Protection of the environment must be given broad consideration in the process of societal change.
- The solution of the Kurdish question will be realized within the framework of the democratization of the countries exercising hegemonic power over the different parts of Kurdistan. This process is not limited to these countries, though, but rather extends across the entire Middle East. The freedom of Kurdistan is tied to the democratization of the Middle East. A free Kurdistan is only conceivable as a democratic Kurdistan.
- The individual freedom of expression and decision is indefeasible. No country, no state, no society has the right to restrict these freedoms, whatever reasons they may cite. Without the freedom of the individual there will be no freedom for the society, just as freedom for the individual is impossible if the society is not free.
- A just redistribution of the economic resources presently in the possession of the state is eminently important for the liberation process of the society. Economic supply must not become a tool in the hands of the state for exercising pressure on the people. Economic resources are not the property of the state but of the society.

An economy close to the people should be based on such redistribution and be use value-oriented instead of exclusively pursuing an economy based on commodification and profits. The

profit-based economy has not only damaged the society but also the environment. One of the main reasons for the decline of the society lies in the level of expansion of the financial markets. The artificial production of needs, the more and more adventurous search for new sales markets and the boundless greed for ever growing profits lets the divide between rich and poor steadily grow and enlarges the army of those living below the poverty line or even dying of hunger. Humanity can no longer sustain itself with such an economic policy. This is therefore the biggest challenge for socialist politics: Progressive transition from a commodity oriented society to a society producing on the basis of use value; from a production based on profit to a production based on sharing.

- Although the Kurds assign the family a high value it is still a place where freedom does not abound. Lack of financial resources, lack of education, lack of health care do not allow for much development. The situation of women and children is disastrous. So-called honor-killings of female family members are a symbol of this disaster. They become the targets of an archaic notion of honor, which reflects the degeneration of the entire society. Male frustration over the existing conditions is directed against the supposedly weakest members of the society: women. The family as a social institution experiences a crisis. Here, too, a solution can only be found in the context of an overall democratization.

The present situation and suggestions for a solution

The Kurdish-Turkish relations in Turkey play a key role with a view to a solution of the Kurdish question. In this respect, the Kurds in Iraq, Iran, and Syria have only a limited potential and can probably only support a possible overall solution. The Kurds in Iraq give a very good example. The semi-state Kurdish autonomy is indirectly the result of worldwide efforts on the part of Turkey, the U.S. and their allies to denounce the PKK as a terror organization. Without consent by Ankara this "solution" would not have been possible. The chaos caused by this solution is obvious, and the result unforeseeable. It is also unclear which direction the feudal-liberal Kurdish national authority in Iraq will take in the long run and how it will affect Iran, Syria, and Turkey. There is the danger of a regional escalation of the conflict similar in shape to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A flare-up of Kurdish nationalism might even radicalize the Persian, Arab and Turkish nationalists further, making a solution of the problem more difficult.

This prospect needs to be contrasted with a solution free of nationalist aspirations, which recognizes the existing territorial borders. In return, the status of the Kurds will be put down in the respective constitutions thus warranting their rights concerning culture, language, and political participation. Such a model would be largely in accordance with the historical and societal realities of the region.

In the light of this, making peace with the Kurds seems inevitable. It is highly improbable that the present war or any future

war will yield anything else but a Pyrrhus' victory. Therefore, this war must be put to an end. It has been lasting too long already. It is in the interest of all countries of the region to follow the example of other countries and take the necessary steps.

The Kurds only demand that their existence be respected; they demand freedom of culture and a fully democratic system. A more humane and modest solution is impossible. The examples of South Africa, Wales, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Corsica demonstrate the ways in which different modern countries have been able to solve similar problems in the course of their history. Furthermore, these comparisons help us to find a more objective approach to our own problems.

Turning our backs to violence as a means of solving the Kurdish question and overcoming the repressive policy of denial at least in part, are closely connected to the fact that we upheld the democratic option. The ban on Kurdish language and culture, education and broadcasting is in itself a terrorist act and practically invites counter violence. Violence, however, has been used by both sides to an extent that goes clearly beyond legitimate self defense.

Many movements today take to even more extreme methods. However, we have declared unilateral ceasefires several times, we have withdrawn large numbers of our fighters from Turkish territory, and thus refuted the accusation of terrorism. Our peace efforts, however, have been ignored over the years. Our initiatives never met a response. Rather, a group of Kurdish politicians sent out as ambassadors of peace was detained and handed long prison terms. Our efforts for peace have wrongly been interpreted as weakness. There is no other explanation for statements like "the PKK and Ocalan are practically finished" or, that our initiatives were only tactical. So they claimed they only needed to proceed a little bit tougher in order to smash the PKK. So they increased their attacks on the Kurdish liberation movement. Nobody asks,

however, why they never succeeded? It is impossible to solve the Kurdish question by means of violence. The attitude described above also contributed to the failure of the ceasefire that began on October 1, 2006. I had called on the PKK to offer this ceasefire. Some Intellectuals and non-government organizations had demanded such a step. However, again it was not taken seriously. Instead, racism and chauvinism were stirred up creating an atmosphere of confrontation. Besides, we must not forget that the AKP also uses this issue to play down their own problems with the Kemalist elite by making compromises with the army and speculating on the escalation of the Kurdish problem. Presently, the government restricts itself to some half-hearted measures in order to wrench some concessions from the EU. They are trying to win time with the help of the harmonization laws enacted in the context of the EU accession process. In reality, these supposed reforms are just waste-paper.

The exacerbating conflict is cause for concern. Nevertheless, I will not give up my hopes for a just peace. It can become possible at any time.

I offer the Turkish society a simple solution. We demand a democratic nation. We are not opposed to the unitary state and republic. We accept the republic, its unitary structure and laicism. However, we believe that it must be redefined as a democratic state respecting peoples, cultures and rights. On this basis, the Kurds must be free to organize in a way that they can live their culture and language and can develop economically and ecologically. This would allow Kurds, Turks and other cultures to come together under the roof of a democratic nation in Turkey. This is only possible, though, with a democratic constitution and an advanced legal framework warranting respect for different cultures.

Our idea of a democratic nation is not defined by flags and borders. Our idea of a democratic nation embraces a model based

on democracy instead of a model based on state structures and ethnic origins. Turkey needs to define itself as a country which includes all ethnic groups. This would be a model based on human rights instead of religion or race. Our idea of a democratic nation embraces all ethnic groups and cultures.

Against this background let me summarize the solution I propose:

- The Kurdish question is to be treated as a fundamental question of democratization. The Kurdish identity must be put down in the constitution and integrated in the legal system. The new constitution shall contain an article of the following wording: "The constitution of the Turkish republic recognizes the existence and the expression of all its cultures in a democratic way." This would be sufficient.
- Cultural and language rights must be protected by law. There must not be any restrictions for radio, TV and press. Kurdish programs and programs in other languages must be treated by the same rules and regulations as Turkish programs. The same must be true for cultural activities.
- Kurdish should be taught in elementary schools. People who want their kids to get such an education must be able to send them to such a school. High schools should offer lessons on Kurdish culture, language and literature as elective courses. Universities must be permitted to establish institutes for Kurdish language, literature, culture and history.
- The freedom of expression and organization must not be restricted. Political activities must not be restricted or regulated by the state. This must also be true in the context of the Kurdish question without restriction.
- Party and election laws must be subjected to a democratic reform. The laws must warrant the participation of the Kurdish

people and all other democratic groups in the process of democratic decision-making.

- The village-guard system and the illegal networks within the state-structures must be disbanded.
- People who have been evicted from their villages during the war must be allowed to return without impediments. All administrative, legal, economical or social measures necessary must be met. Furthermore, a developmental program must be initiated in order to help the Kurdish population to earn a living and improve the level of living.
- A law for peace and participation in the society shall be enacted. This law shall enable the members of the guerrilla, the imprisoned and those who are in exile to take part in the public life without any preconditions.

Additionally, immediate measures on the road to a solution need to be discussed. A democratic action plan must be formulated and put into practice. In order to reconcile the society, truth and justice commissions shall be set up. Both sides must find out what they have done wrong and discuss it openly. This is the only way to achieve the reconciliation of the society.

Whenever states or organizations cannot make progress anymore, intellectuals may serve as mediators. South Africa, Northern Ireland or Sierra Leone have made positive experiences with this model. They may take the role of arbitrators, with the help of whom both parties can be moved in the direction of a just peace. The commissions may include intellectuals, lawyers, physicians or scientists. When the day comes that we put down our arms, it will only be into the hands of such a commission, provided it is a commission determined to achieve justice.

Why would we surrender our arms without the prospect of justice? The beginning of such a process also depends on goodwill and dialogue. Should indeed a dialogue come about, we will be able to begin a process similar to the last unlimited ceasefire.

I am prepared to do all I can. The government, however, needs to show its will for peace. It needs to take the initiative. This is what they need to do, if they do not wish to be responsible for the consequences all on their own.

In case our efforts for a peaceful solution might fail or are sacrificed to day by day politics, power struggles or profit-seeking, the present conflict will exacerbate and its end will become unforeseeable. The chaos following will see no winners.

At last, Turkey needs to muster the strength to recognize its own reality, the reality of the Kurdish existence and global dynamics. A state which denies reality will eventually and inevitably find itself on the brink of existence.

It is crucial, therefore, to take the steps that will lead this country to a lasting peace.

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